

# Delivering the destination promise

Rebecca Gibson asks MSC Cruises' Elisabetta De Nardo and Carnival UK's Steven Young how they choose the ports and destinations that will create unforgettable onshore experiences for guests



Destinations like the Norwegian fjords are popular with P&O Cruises' guests because of their natural beauty

**W**hy do people choose a cruise holiday? For some, it offers the perfect opportunity to enjoy luxury accommodation, innovative entertainment, multicultural cuisine and various types of activities all in one place. For others, it's the ideal way to quickly and easily explore multiple destinations, each with their own natural, cultural, historical, adventure or culinary experiences. Designing itineraries that cater to everyone is challenging for all cruise lines.

"Some guests want to visit the marquee ports that everyone talks about, others want to explore smaller off-the-beaten track destinations," says Elisabetta De Nardo, vice president of port development at MSC Cruises. "Some

want a slow cruise with extended port stays or overnights in their favourite town, others want sea days so they can fully relax and enjoy the innovations and warm hospitality on our ships. We must design itineraries that cover all preferences."

According to Steven Young, vice president of port and shore operations for Carnival UK's P&O Cruises and Cunard brands, planning the perfect itinerary can be more of an art than a science.

"We have to balance potential guests' interests with practical concerns," he explains. "We want to visit ports that offer guests unique experiences and treasured memories, and every destination should offer something different, yet still complement the other ports of call."



**"Forward-thinking cruise lines like MSC Cruises want forward-thinking ports"**

**Elisabetta De Nardo, MSC Cruises**





MSC Cruises sails to destinations that offer high-quality terminal facilities and easy access to local attractions, such as in Dubrovnik, Croatia

Destinations also need the ‘wow’ factor. “It’s important to continually introduce new destinations to our guests, but it’s hard to sell itineraries with only these destinations, so we ensure that there’s always at least one marquee destination in every itinerary,” says De Nardo. “Plus, we want ports of call that will be true eye-openers. Thankfully, we’re blessed with these types of destinations worldwide.”

There are practical considerations too. For example, every itinerary must have a strong source market.

“We look for cities and ports that are well-known overseas, have a sizeable local and regional population and good road, rail and air links to provide access to guests who live further afield,” says De Nardo. “This is particularly important for homeports or turnaround ports. MSC Cruises already has a range of ideal source markets in destinations across the Mediterranean, South America, the Gulf and Southern Africa. As airlines continue to increase low-cost air travel options in Europe, new

destinations are emerging as the source markets of the future, even those that were unthinkable until recently.”

In addition, every port must have high-quality terminal facilities for guests to embark and disembark safely and travel to local attractions effortlessly. “Homeports also need a range of providers that offer high quality services for stores, waste reception, luggage handling, repairs and accommodation,” says Young. “Southampton, UK, has been P&O Cruises’ homeport for almost 200 years and over the next three years, we’ll grow our capacity by over 60%.”

Guest feedback plays a big part in final port decisions. “We have a detailed port rating process that combines appeal and satisfaction scores, and we test itinerary appeal directly with guests through market research,” says Young.

Ports, tourist boards and regional cruise networks play a pivotal role



“We have to balance potential guests’ interests with practical concerns”

Steven Young, Carnival UK





P&O Cruises ensures that it can provide a range of activities in every port of call

in helping cruise lines to promote destinations and overcome the operational challenges associated with planning itineraries.

“It’s difficult for cruise lines to attract potential customers to relatively unknown destinations, so local governments and ports can invest in marketing to push for greater awareness on the global stage,” says De Nardo. “We’re growing exponentially so we need ports to work in tandem with us to develop workable long-term plans for sustainable tourism, which includes investments in elements such as green shore power and LNG bunkering.”

Young agrees. “Ports and destination organisations have a hugely valuable role in facilitating open discussion and collective forums between all interested parties, both within the cruise industry and the local communities we touch,” he explains. “We really value having regular conversations about what our guests want and what developments are taking place in destinations.”

De Nardo adds: “We’re all in this together, so we must collaborate to tackle pertinent issues and plan ahead. Forward-thinking cruise lines like MSC Cruises want forward-thinking ports – it’s the only way we can create itineraries that are mutually beneficial and also deliver the best possible experiences to our guests.” **C&F**

## Delightful destinations

Ports and destination authorities play a key role in helping cruise lines to deliver memorable onshore experiences. We highlight some that stand out from the crowd



Photo: Frédéric Verhoye

### A unique destination

Filled with Unesco World Heritage-listed architecture, Le Havre in France is no longer regarded as simply the gateway to Paris by cruise lines. Today, the birthplace of the Impressionist art movement is making its mark as a cruise destination in its own right. The city waterfront was completely renovated in 2019 to link the cruise terminal to the beach. Le Havre has also stationed a dedicated multilingual team at both the cruise terminal and the shuttle stop in the city centre to provide each passenger with a map and personalised advice to help them make the most of their visit.



### The home of a princess

There’s a wide variety of exciting experiences awaiting cruise guests and crew when they sail into Arendal, Norway. Highlights include swimming in a heated floating pool in Arendal’s marina, excursions to Raet Marine National Park, boat trips in the archipelago, walking tours through the old town and visits to museums, old churches and shops. There’s even the chance to visit an inhabited lighthouse with a story-telling lighthouse keeper. Meanwhile, Disney fans can also meet Elsa, the protagonist of *Frozen*, in Arendal, which inspired the princess’s fictional home.



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### Exploring the wilderness

A call at the port of Longyearbyen in Norway's Svalbard archipelago gives cruise guests the chance to explore one of the world's largest areas of untouched wilderness, the High Arctic. Slow cruising in Isfjord enables guests to see various natural landscapes, wildlife and cultural heritage sites, including Russian settlements Barentsburg and Pyramiden. Guests can also enjoy hiking, kayaking and dog sledding, or enjoy the local cuisine.



### Getting closer to nature

With three national parks, two glaciers, several fruit farms, and Norway's biggest mountain plateau and second longest fjord, Hardangerfjord is a popular destination for nature-loving cruise guests. Voringfoss Waterfall is the most visited natural attraction in Norway, while the Norwegian Nature Centre provides a closer look at the region's wildlife and climate through its digital exhibits. Cruise visitors can also get closer to nature by taking guided kayak, seaplane, cycling, boat, raft and snowshoe hiking tours.

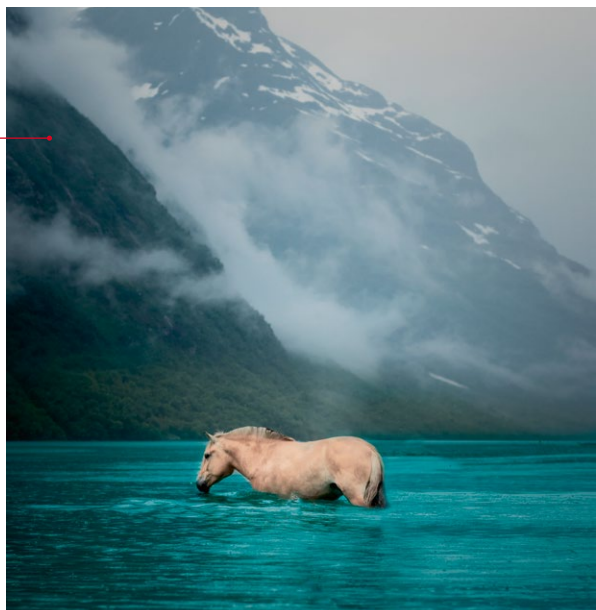


### Adventures for all

Norway's Sørlandet region offers something for everyone – from a picturesque coastline dotted with white wooden houses, to lush inland valleys with Unesco World Heritage sites. Popular activities for cruise guests who call at the Port of Kristiansand include visiting the world's northernmost vineyards, heading to a basketry to learn about willow weaving, touring an oyster farm and joining an eco-themed city walk. Adventurous guests can also try glow-in-the-dark golf, sightseeing by Segway, sailing around the archipelago sailing or white water rafting in Setesdal.

### Home of the Vikings

Passengers are made to feel welcome as soon as they arrive in Nordfjordeid, Norway. The port's friendly team can highlight what visitors can expect during a day call at the small but modern town, which is home to fjord horses, Viking graves and opera house. Cruise guests can visit local homes and farms, hike in the mountains or explore the Monastery of Selje. Families can enjoy a relaxed atmosphere as they interact with the animals at Hakalegarden or take the Loen Skylift to Briksdal Glacier to see fantastic views of the landscape.







## A destination within a destination

Galataport Istanbul will soon open the world's first underground terminal in Istanbul, Turkey. The terminal will span 29,000 square metres and be accessed via a special hatch system. Above ground, guests will be able to enjoy gastronomy, shopping and cultural experiences, as well as views of the Bosphorus. With two art museums and a recreational area surrounded by historical monuments along with cafes, restaurants, boutiques and a hotel chain, Galataport will become a new destination within a destination.



## Wonders of the past

Nestled on a stunning peninsula, Bodrum is one of the most attractive coastal cities in Turkey. The destination is home to one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus – and Unesco World Heritage site St. Peter's Castle. Cruise visitors can also discover the Mausoleum of King Hecatomnos and see excavations at the sites of the ancient cities of Stratonikeia, Pedesa, Euromos and Iassos. The city also boasts villages of white-washed houses trimmed with purple bougainvillea and miles of sandy beaches, making it an unforgettable port of call.



## Committing to quality

Valletta Cruise Port has built a solid reputation for delivering high-quality cruise services. Central to the port's modus operandi is flexibility, reliability and commitment, an approach which is clearly appreciated by both the passengers and the cruise trade because Valletta has become one of the top 14 ports of call in the Mediterranean. The port recorded more than 900,000 passenger movements in 2019 and there are plenty of exciting things in store for 2020 in terms of improving and sustaining core operations. Valletta aims to continue working with other local stakeholders to deliver a quality product and an excellent service to everyone who visits.

## A Croatian cruise gem

Located in the centre of the Adriatic close to an international airport and a modern highway network, Croatia's new Zadar Cruise Port is ideal for both transit and turnaround cruise calls.

Zadar is a vibrant historical town with Roman ruins, medieval churches and Unesco World Heritage-listed fortifications, surrounded by cafes, wine bars and Mediterranean gastronomic experiences. The town is also close to five national parks, giving cruise visitors the opportunity for both relaxation and adrenaline-filled adventures.



## Staying strong for the future

As visitors to Spain's cruise ports reach an all-time high, Puertos del Estado and the port authorities are working together to continue providing an unforgettable cruise guest experience across the country. As part of this, the ports are focusing on improving their environmental credentials by implementing measures such as the electrification of docks to allow cruise ships to shut down their engines in port and connect to shore power. This will help to reduce emissions and improve air quality in the areas surrounding the ports.





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### An unforgettable arrival

Entering Haifa Port on a cruise ship is one of the most beautiful ways to arrive at a city, thanks to the Baha'i Gardens (a Unesco World Heritage Site) stretching along the mountain above the berths. The port is close to downtown Haifa, which offers multiple unforgettable experiences for cruise guests. Guests can find information about all the tourist attractions and services at the terminal, as well as at [cruisehaifa.com](http://cruisehaifa.com), which has a map listing the businesses around the port and shows the discounts they offer to anyone with a cruise ID card.



### A warm island welcome

Taiwan, also known as Formosa, is home to 16 indigenous tribes, all of whom have preserved their treasured traditions. Cruise ships arrive at one of the island's four ports – Keelung, Taichung, Kaohsiung and Hualien – and each one is warmly welcomed by indigenous people who perform their traditional welcome dance. All ports are managed by Taiwan International Ports Corporation, which aims to deliver a memorable experience to all cruise guests. In 2021, the port operator will complete the new Kaohsiung Cruise Passenger Terminal to provide another option for cruise calls.



### A taste of Morocco

Tangier City Port is focused on developing the best possible customer experience for cruise guests sailing into Tangier, Morocco. The port provides a patriotic welcome to ships arriving at the quay to introduce the Moroccan culture and hospitality to cruise guests. As the cruise terminal is only a few minutes away from the city's best attractions, which means guests can quickly immerse themselves in its rich historical and cultural heritage. A wide variety of shore excursions and adventures are available, including the chance to taste world-famous Moroccan cuisine at various local eateries.

### Designed for everyone

Cyril B. Romney Tortola Pier Park in the British Virgin Islands has been developed to offer all the features that are important to cruise ship guests. "From the moment visitors disembark they are welcomed by a host of tourism ambassadors who are stationed there," says Vance Lewis, CEO of the facility. "We have multilingual greeters who are ready to assist visitors where needed, and we place a lot of effort into curating an experience with activities that can be enjoyed by all. Our shopping and dining provide a superlative environment for the entire family."

